**Session 10-14: Readicide: how schools are killing reading and what you can do about it**  
By Kelly Gallagher, Richard Allington  
The following website is from a new book written by Kelly Gallagher. This is the first few chapters of the book. Based on what you have read, what are your thoughts on Kelly Gallagher's perception on what high schools are doing to hurt reading.

Kelly Gallagher’s thesis, “Rather than helping students, many of the reading practices found in today’s classrooms are actually contributing to the death of reading” is, sadly, right on target. I have been teaching sixth grade reading for twenty-three years, the last eleven as a reading specialist. When I think back to my first years of teaching, it saddens me because my teaching today bears no resemblance to my teaching back then. Even worse, what I was able to do and what my students were able to do back then is vastly different as well. I wholeheartedly agree with Gallagher when he states “We have lost our way. It is time to stop the madness.”

The majority of my students consider reading to be a chore and it is not something most of them would choose to do in their free time. Unfortunately, we are doing nothing to change that. We no longer have SSR time. We no longer teach novels. We no longer read to them simply for enjoyment. Why? Because we are now required to strictly adhere to a core basal program, what Gallagher refers to as a “magic pill” program, which emphasizes breadth over depth and dictates our every step. We have a pacing calendar that guides our movement through that program, whether the students are ready to move on or not. “Progress monitoring” is now a part of our daily lives. The expectation is, if we do all of these things, our students will magically develop a skill for and a love of reading. Of course, this is not the case. They hate it and we hate it. Unrealistic state standards and the pressure of improving PSSA scores has led to drastic changes in what we are both expected and allowed to do with our students. The negative effects of this are clear.

The only thing I take issue with is the author’s assumption that teachers have a choice. In many schools today, teachers have been stripped of their creativity and autonomy. Our movements are watched closely. Lesson plans must be turned in and must reflect the core program. If a “walk-through” takes place, you most certainly better be teaching what is indicated in your lesson plans. There is very little freedom with regard to what we teach and how we teach it. It may not be this way in every school, but this is how it is in mine and in the schools of many of my friends. I have expressed my concerns to administration, most recently concerning the lack of independent reading time and the resulting lack of comprehension skills. My concerns were not appreciated and promptly ignored.

I long for the days when my instruction was novel-based and skills and strategies were addressed via authentic literature. In those days, my students looked forward to reading. Their comprehension skills were sharp and they had a well-developed ability to reflect upon their reading, both verbally and in writing. Class discussions were lively and everyone had something to say. SSR time was built into the daily schedule and students would beg for more. Authentic reading was the foundation of everything we did and the students thrived.

Tomorrow, my students will sit down to take the new ELA PSSA and I am worried. We have done the practice passages with our students. The type of higher-level critical reading and writing that will be expected of them is not addressed in our “magic pill” program. Our students rarely read independently in school. Instead, they are guided through everything by a series of forced questions and skill worksheets, never having to independently make sense of text. Yet, on this new test, that is exactly what we will ask them to do. Nothing we are doing has prepared them for this. I often ask myself, how long will it be before “they” realize we are on the wrong track? How long before they start to listen to the experts—the teachers working with these children daily and observing the long-term negative effects of the changes they have made? How long before we stop the madness?

**Read the following articles and questions, and post your responses to the discussion board.**

1. Discuss the importance of providing professional development in literacy strategies.

*It is imperative that we provide quality and ongoing professional development in literacy strategies. First, it must be provided to content area teachers who are now expected to be teachers of literacy as well. It must also be provided to any other teacher who may not have the experience or background necessary to provide the literacy instruction students need.*

2. Discuss how more reading time can be placed into the teaching schedule.

*Independent reading time must once again become an important part of the school day. In many schools, SSR has been phased out in favor of more instructional time. In my opinion, this is a mistake. Students need to have time, every day, when they read simply for enjoyment. Allowing them a few minutes to talk about their reading would be beneficial as well. SSR can be scheduled as a classroom warm-up or wrap-up activity. It can also be scheduled as a school-wide activity. Each school has a unique schedule, but I believe that if SSR were a valued priority the time would be found.*

3. Identify and discuss the importance of monitoring instruction of literacy in all content areas.

*It is important to monitor literacy instruction in all content areas to ensure that our students are receiving the instruction they need. We should continually monitor how our students are doing and if the instruction we are providing is allowing them to grow as readers and writers. It is also important to monitor so we can provide assistance to any teachers struggling with their literacy instruction.*  
  
4. Identify the importance that all teachers are teachers of literacy.

*It is very important that all teachers consider themselves to be teachers of literacy. To succeed in any content area, students need to be able to comprehend, to think critically, and to develop oral and written responses. Each subject area is unique so literacy skills specific to each area need to be addressed by the experts in those fields.*

5. Discuss the importance of encouraging students to analyze and question texts and media to ascertain the author’s purposes and messages.

*Every day, we are bombarded with information via television, radio, social media, etc. We can’t believe everything we read or hear. It is imperative that students develop the ability to question what they are reading, to think about their own perspectives in relation to the information, to recognize bias and propaganda, and to draw their own conclusions based on the evidence provided. These are the skills required of an active member of a democratic society.*   
  
6. Discuss the importance of looking for students’ proficiencies outside class and incorporating them into teaching.

*Every child comes to us with their own strengths and weaknesses, interests and aptitudes. If we truly know our students we can use this knowledge to our advantage, particularly with our reluctant and unmotivated readers. Choosing materials and activities based on student interests would provide motivation and purpose for the students.*   
7. Discuss the importance of interdisciplinary and real-world projects that allow students to learn concepts, apply information, represent knowledge and use technological tools.

*Interdisciplinary projects can be an incredible learning experience and one of the best ways to help students see the relationship between each subject area and the connecting role that literacy plays. Connecting activities to technology and the real world provides a realistic purpose. These kinds of activities help students see how what they are doing in school is relevant to a person’s everyday life.*